Artifact, Narrative, and Imagination

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A map showing the Greek territories and colonies during the Archaic period.
Ancient Greek Numbers (codes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Letter</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
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<td>Delta</td>
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<td>Theta</td>
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<td>Tau</td>
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<td>Upsilon</td>
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<td>Phi</td>
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<td>Chi</td>
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<td>Psi</td>
<td>6-7</td>
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<td>Omega</td>
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Archaic Greek Alphabet

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Ancient Greek Musical Notation

- Mixolydian: \( \text{Mixo-lydian} \)
- Lydian: \( \text{Lydi}n \)
- Phrygian: \( \text{Phryg}i\)an
- Dorian: \( \text{Dor}i\)an
- Hypo-lydian: \( \text{Hypo-ly}dian \)

\[ \text{Mixo-lydian}: \text{Mixo-lydian} \]
\[ \text{Lydian}: \text{Lydi}n \]
\[ \text{Phrygian}: \text{Phryg}i\)an
\[ \text{Dorian}: \text{Dor}i\)an
\[ \text{Hypo-lydian}: \text{Hypo-ly}dian \]
\[ \text{[Hypo-phrygian]: \text{Hypo-phryg}i\)an} [\text{Hypo-dorian}: \text{Hypo-dor}i\)an} \]
The notation consists of letter-forms placed above text syllables. Ancient Greek musical notation was capable of representing pitch and note-duration, and to a limited extent, harmony. It was in use from at least the 6th century BC until approximately the 4th century AD; Several complete compositions and fragments of compositions using this notation survive.
Research questions:

When does the written musical tradition begin?

*melography* – reading and writing musical notation

*rhythmography* – synchronizing the notation with the text
An inscription found in Magnesia contains a list of the graduate winners in boys’ competition. For *melography* the victors are three:

[— Ἀρτεμιδοὺς Αἰσχυλίης Ἀναξικράτου μελογραφίαι.

In the inscription from Teos (CIG 3088) are listed the prize winners for the younger class in the gymnasium:

“…for answering, Herakleos; for reading; for calligraphy, for torch, for psalmody; for kithara playing; for singing to the kithara; for *rhythmography*; for comedy; for tragedy; for musical notation (*melography*)…”

**The Problem:** Direct evidence about the ancient Greek *melography* and *rhythmography* is rare to find. Two epigraphic inscriptions from 2 c. B.C.E. provide very brief information about discipline-specific musical training of young professionals as part of their education.
Two epigraphic inscriptions from 2 c. B.C.E.
The earliest surviving examples of musical documents on papyri are from the middle of the 3rd c. B.C.E.
Aristoxenus writes about notation in general, 4th c. B.C.E.
5th c. B.C.E.?
6th c. B.C.E.?
7th c. B.C.E.?

Fragment from Orestes by Euripides – text and musical notation, papyrus, 3rd century B.C.E.
Archaeology of the Artifacts and Reconstruction of the Lost Meaning
A number of music-related images suggest that the painters must have been frequent visitors to musicians' studios, and must have observed music lessons, different musical performances, and even the process of composing music.

Duris cup, Berlin, 485 B.C.E.
Artifacts and Narratives: decoding the meaning

Group I: Images with clear meaning
1. Music lessons
2. Mythological narratives

Group II: Images with open to more than one interpretations
1. Nonsense inscriptions
2. Music lessons? Or what?
3. Fragments.
Holistic approach or “complex systems thinking”

a) **Archaeology** – analysis, identification, reconstruction, typology and chronology of artifacts;

b) **Linguistic aspect** – decoding, reading, translating and interpreting the image language and inscriptions.

c) **Cultural aspect**: integrated analysis of the musical customs and practices in their historical and cultural context;

d) **Physical/psychological aspect** – biomusicological analysis focused on perception, cognition, musical skills, therapeutic and educational use of music, etc.;

**Methodology Explanation**

Analogical reasoning (cognitive approach)

Analogies are used in explaining new concepts and to make discoveries.

Analogical reasoning is based on the brain’s ability to form patterns by association.

The new or unknown concept is compared to something the brain already knows.
Anthropological analysis of music-related narratives and artifacts to crack unsolved riddles inherited from the past

**Lekythos**, Inv. No. 29854; **Oinochoe**, Cat. No. 2725, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris

**Attic r.f. cup**, Basel c. 490 B.C.E., Antikenmuseum BS 465.

Fragment of r.f. kylix from Naukratis circa 485 B.C.E., Oxford G 138,3,5,11.

What do we know about the process of enculturation during the Archaic and Classical period?
Example:
Lekythos, 5th, c. B.C.E., Inv. No. 29854; Oinochoe, 5th, c. B.C.E., Cat. No. 2725, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailes, Paris

Two Greek vases from the early 5th century B.C.E. have nearly identical images:
a professional aulos-player, enhoplios orchēsis (weapon dance) and inscriptions, about which I found no commentary, except the description “meaningless inscriptions”.
The images and the inscriptions on them have attracted very little interest, as the bibliographic references clearly demonstrate.

Why?
How to depict vocal music and how to depict instrumental music?

Fragment: ALKAIOS, Brygos Painter, Attic Red-figure kalathos, 470 c. B.C.E. 04129, Munich, Antikensammlungen, 2416

Lekythos, 5th c. B.C.E., Inv. No. 29854, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles, Paris
Today we “depict a melody” in an image using the symbols of contemporary musical notation.

By analogy, the talented vase painter may have depicted letters signifying/imitating musical notes, undoubtedly identical with letter-forms that were used during the archaic period.

Ancient Greek Musical Notation

Analogical reasoning (cognitive approach): Example
Aulos players, *enhoploos orchesis* and imitation of instrumental musical notation

These rare images are clear evidence that the practice of recording music (melographia) existed in the musicians’ guild long before it became fashionable with artists in early 5th c. B.C.
EXAM IN MELOGRAPHY

Behind the visual narrative

- The painter depicted a musical expert who is an aulos-player.
- His musical instrument (auloi) is hidden in the special skin bag, hanging on the wall (this detail gives the musical context of the image).
- We can see the musician checking whether the melody was recorded correctly.
- The image shows how eager is the young musician to get his master’s approval, while the master holding a stylus checks carefully the music writing on the double-leaved diptychon (tablet).
- His contended smile suggests that the record is so meticulous that it needs no corrections.

Attic r.f. cup Basel c. 490 B.C.E., Antikenmuseum BS 465.
ANCIENT RECORDING STUDIO
MELOGRAPHER RECORDING A SONG

Behind the visual narrative

The image illustrates the process of composing and recording a song:

- the poet wrote down the text on papyrus;
- he then took it to a composer who composed the melody on an aulos;
- his young assistant, who is trained in melographia, recorded the melody on a tablet.

Fragment of r.f. kylix from Naukratis c. 485 B.C., Oxford G 138,3,5,11.
Behind the visual narrative

The images show that the physical act of writing down a melody (melographia) with a stylus on a tablet was done separately from the text.
Rhythmography

Ones the vocal melody was written on a tablet was supposed to be transferred from the tablet to the papyrus, synchronizing it with the text (rhythmography).
Rhythmography

If the transfer of the melody was delayed, or if there was nobody with this specific knowledge in rhythmographia, with time the melody was lost and only the text on the papyrus was left, as it definitely survived longer than the records on the tablets.

Ancient wooden tablet with stylus
This could explain why so many texts of songs (lyrics, comedy, tragedy) from Archaic and Classical period have survived to date without an accompanying melody.


Sappho and Alcaeus (7-6 c. B.C.E.)

Why the *lyric poetry*, designed to be accompanied by *music*, has no any preserved melodies?

ALKAIOS, SAPHO, Attic Red-figure kalathos, 480 c. B.C.E. 04129, Munich, Antikensammlungen, 2416

Fragment from *Orestes* by Euripides – text and musical notation, papyrus, 3rd century B.C.E.
Doubtless there were professional musicians from Archaic and Classical Greece who devoted their efforts to educate and train young talents to capture songs on wooden tablets with the help of letter-symbols. However, the fact that the direct evidence of practicing *melographia* and *rhythmographia* are extremely rare even for the advanced Hellenistic period, and all the existent images showing this act belong to the Classical period, indicates that such experts might have been in demand for centuries.
References:


CVA. 1931. France 10.


Ancient Greek Auloi
Ancient Greece: Song of Seikilos